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Western Europe: Leftist Opposition Parties and INF

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An Intelligence Assessment

State Dept. review
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Western Europe: Leftist Opposition Parties and INF

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An Intelligence Assessment

This paper was prepared by [redacted]
Political-Social Issues Branch, European Issues
Division, Office of European Analysis. It was
coordinated with the National Intelligence Council.

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**Western Europe:
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Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 20 June 1983
was used in this report.*

Since relinquishing their governing responsibilities, three parties whose leaders participated in NATO's December 1979 INF decision—the West German Social Democratic Party, the Norwegian Labor Party, and the Danish Social Democratic Party—have increasingly come to criticize the policies of the United States and of their own governments regarding INF deployment. Their positions now reflect more faithfully the longstanding doubts within the parties' rank and file about INF. Although these three parties do not oppose deployment categorically, they have insisted so strongly that it be precluded by an arms control agreement that their interpretation of NATO's INF decision now differs markedly from that of the Allied governments.

The three parties have thus moved in the direction of Belgium's (Flemish) Socialists, who opposed INF while playing a minor role in a coalition government in 1979-81, and the British and Dutch Labor parties, which were not in power at the time of the NATO decision and have taken extreme positions on nuclear issues.

We believe the maneuvering by north European leftist parties will only affect government INF policy in Denmark. The British and West German Governments are committed to proceed with deployment. In the Netherlands and Belgium, leftist parties have helped delay a positive decision on deployment, but they have not been the most important factors. In Norway, which contributes to INF infrastructure funding even though it will not base missiles, the government has been able to maintain its support for INF. In Denmark, which also is not a basing country, however, the conservative-led government is likely to face the continuing problem of anti-INF resolutions proposed by the opposition and passed by the parliament.

Barring an arms control agreement, we believe leftist parties will intensify their efforts to encourage steps toward limited disarmament and to revitalize detente. Their coordination of positions probably will remain informal, however, and their commitment to peace movement activity will remain less than total, because they want to retain flexibility to respond to their local political situations. Although they would become more circumspect if they returned to power, they probably would still push more aggressively than other Allied governments for arms control, thereby casting doubt on the unity of the Alliance and its commitment to nuclear deterrence.

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The Search for an Alternative Policy

Despite the different political contexts in which these six North European leftist parties—the West German Social Democratic Party, (SPD) the Norwegian Labor Party, the Danish Social Democratic Party, the British Labor Party, the Dutch Labor Party, and the Belgian (Flemish) Socialist Party—operate, their public positions on INF have a number of points in common:

- Insistence that, unless INF arms control negotiations succeed, talks should continue, and the deployment of missiles should be postponed.
- Open dissatisfaction with arms control initiatives proposed by the United States.
- Criticism of their governments for allegedly failing to uphold national interests and to “keep pressure” on the United States regarding arms control.
- Advocacy of various specific “solutions,” such as inclusion of French and British systems in the talks, merging the INF and START talks, or renouncing Pershing II deployment. Proponents of these ideas say their aim is to promote an arms control agreement; in reality, the proposals have a disruptive effect within NATO.
- Advocacy of some form of nuclear freeze.
- Consideration of nuclear-weapons-free zones in Europe.
- Some degree of participation in “peace movement” activities. []

Although these common precepts reflect exchanges of information and ideas on security issues, the parties have shied away from issuing joint positions. To do so would underline the fact that they are all out of power and might give their political opponents an opportunity to label them an anti-NATO cabal. The West German Social Democrats, in particular, have little to

gain and a good deal to lose from a more formal association with parties that many West Germans view as weak or neutralist. []

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In individual cases, these parties have created substantial problems for INF. The Scandinavian and Dutch parties, for example, have decisively changed their earlier positions and voted against infrastructure funding for the INF program. The British and Dutch parties say they will oppose any INF deployment, even if partial deployment were allowed in a Geneva agreement. []

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In the West German, Norwegian, and Danish parties—all of which were in the government at the time of the NATO decision—there has been more continuity than has generally been recognized. There was considerable dissatisfaction at the grassroots level in these parties with the idea of INF deployment at the time of the dual-track decision in 1979. Some of this sentiment found expression that December in the North Atlantic Council, where, according to press reports, the Scandinavians in particular pressed for the second (or “negotiations”) track. The Danes even proposed that the INF decision be postponed for six months in hopes that a road to arms control would open up. By 1981, press reporting of local party gatherings and public statements by many party officials indicated that most local organizations in all six parties opposed missile deployments. The pronouncements of these organizations often rejected deployment entirely; even when they did not, they usually undercut the deployment option by stressing continuing negotiations and the need for a second decision point. []

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Considerably before the West German, Norwegian, and Danish parties went into opposition, therefore, [] government ministers were searching for a solution to the domestic

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political problem posed by prospective INF deployments. To some extent they also shared the concern of their parties about the arms race and were unsure about and sometimes dissatisfied with US nuclear weapons policy. Many of the ideas listed above were communicated to US officials by party leaders, but they generally were presented as private suggestions; they emerged in public, if at all, as trial balloons floated by lesser party figures. Currently, authoritative party figures openly declare their concerns about the way in which the United States and its European partners are interpreting the 1979 INF decision.

The "Scandilux" Group

One reflection of the desire of these parties to find an alternative to INF deployment is a series of meetings that party representatives from small, north European NATO allies began holding in January 1981. The original members of the group were the Dutch Labor Party and the Belgian (Flemish) Socialist Party—which had rejected INF deployment in their countries from the outset—along with the Norwegian and Danish parties. The Luxembourg Socialists were included soon afterward, while the West German SPD and the British Labor Party were invited as participating "observers." (C NF)

Judging from public statements by party officials, the Scandinavians and some of the West German Social Democrats were interested in this forum primarily as a way of exerting pressure on the United States—first to open INF negotiations with the Soviet Union, and then to be conciliatory in the talks. Although these parties have never joined with the Dutch Laborites and the Flemish Socialists in explicitly rejecting INF deployment, the Scandinavians did send government ministers to the meetings to discuss ways of promoting progress in the negotiations, and on broader issues such as nuclear-weapons-free zones.

The Scandilux group continues to meet about twice a year, discussing security issues informally without issuing formal communiques. A Danish Social Democrat told US officials recently that the meetings have little direct effect on the positions of individual parties, but we believe the meetings ensure that "creative" ideas for arms control suggested by one participant are picked up by the others.

Party Maneuvering

Some press analysis has suggested that all these leftist parties have enthusiastically seized the opportunity to win back public support by embracing the nuclear issue and blasting the INF program. This description actually fits the British, Dutch, and Belgian (Flemish) parties better than the parties that helped shape the 1979 decision. In fact, we believe leaders of the West German, Norwegian, and Danish parties are thinking more in defensive than offensive terms. Unaccustomed to being out of power, they are worried about defections from their ranks to smaller, more militant parties farther to the left. An official of the West German SPD recently told US diplomats that his party was particularly concerned about losing the support of youth. In our judgment, the fear that their parties will fragment is one factor that has persuaded officials of these three parties to bow to grassroots pressure on some aspects of security issues.

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Within the British and Dutch Labor parties and the Belgian (Flemish) Socialists, however, antinuclear sentiment has made greater headway. In the British and Flemish cases, politicians intent on highlighting the INF issue gained control of the parties. In the Dutch case, the traditionally Atlanticist leadership remained in place, but pressure from young Turks and the leadership's own irritation with some aspects of US policies prompted it to join the attack on INF. Each of these parties made INF a prominent issue in its last electoral campaign—with a notable lack of success.

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Norwegian Labor Party

Norway and Denmark have long pursued a policy of excluding nuclear weapons from their territory in peacetime. The last Labor government in Norway consistently supported the dual-track INF decision, but, like the Schmidt government, it found its task eased somewhat by the ambiguity of that decision. Thus, Norway's position could be taken by the United States as support for the deployment track, while disarmament advocates in Norway could interpret it as support for the arms control track. By avoiding specifics, an uneasy equilibrium was maintained, though not without creating some government anxiety that led to concessions to domestic pressure groups on other nuclear issues. During 1981, for example, the Labor Party and the government flirted seriously with the idea of a Nordic nuclear-weapons-free zone. Officials apparently viewed this as a relatively harmless safety valve that would lessen pressure on the INF program. [REDACTED]

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Since going into opposition, the Labor Party has avoided giving an unconditional "no" to INF deployment—but only barely. The party has called for Soviet reductions in exchange for no NATO deployments and a NATO abstention from deployment while negotiations continue. It has also gone further than the West Germans by calling for a halt to basing preparations. [REDACTED]

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By far the most disruptive decision taken by the Norwegian Labor Party so far was its vote against INF infrastructure funding last November. The conservative Willoch government created a showdown by changing previous government policy and making the INF infrastructure budget an item requiring a separate vote in parliament. The issue engaged the left wing of the Labor Party, and the party leadership had to agree to a negative vote to prevent a split. The government defeated the attempt to cut off infrastructure funding by only one vote. [REDACTED]

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The press has reported that party chairman Gro Harlem Brundtland, as part of her continuing effort to prevent a definitive anti-INF move by the party, has recently created a new committee charged with considering possible alternatives to replace NATO's "flexible response" strategy. The activities of this committee, added to the continuing discussion of a Nordic nuclear-free zone, will ensure that the Norwegian public will be bombarded with a continuing stream of heterodox strategic ideas. [REDACTED]

Danish Social Democrats

The activities of the Danish Social Democrats on INF have been virtually identical with those of the Norwegian Laborites, but the precarious parliamentary position of the center-right government has made leftist efforts in Denmark more effective. Last December, parliament voted to freeze INF infrastructure funding, with the Social Democrats voting for the resolution and the government parties abstaining in order to avoid a vote of confidence. Last month, the Social Democrats pushed through a parliamentary resolution calling for a deferral of INF deployment. [REDACTED]

US Embassy officials in Copenhagen have reported that party Chairman and former Prime Minister Anker Jorgensen has long had serious reservations about the deployment of new nuclear weapons. Now that his party is out of government, he appears disinclined to try to rein in those with similar sentiments. Moreover, according to press reports, the vice chairman of the party recently spoke at a peace demonstration and welcomed the peace movement's increasing role in Denmark and within the party. [REDACTED]

Dutch Labor Party

Under the leadership of former Prime Minister Joop den Uyl, the Labor Party's platform on nuclear issues has been slightly less sweeping than that of its British counterpart. During a brief stint in the coalition government in 1981-82, party leaders supported what were termed "passive preparations" for INF deployment, following den Uyl's argument that some possibility of deployment was necessary to prod the Soviets at Geneva. Nevertheless, Labor has been critical of the INF program ever since the 1979 decision, and party leaders do not hesitate to voice publicly the party's opposition to deployment. [REDACTED]

Following the lead of the Scandinavians, the Labor Party in March introduced a parliamentary resolution (which was defeated) to withhold the Dutch contribution to INF infrastructure funding. In response to very strong antinuclear sentiment in local party organizations and the general public, the party leadership has also called for a severe reduction in the number of nuclear tasks assigned to the Dutch armed forces. The leadership has also announced that the party will participate in the big peace demonstration scheduled for October with the slogan "No new nuclear weapons in Europe, not in the Netherlands or any other country." [REDACTED]

Belgian Socialist Parties

Belgium's (Flemish) Socialists are the least significant of the parties discussed here. Far less influential in linguistically divided Belgium than their French-speaking brethren (who take little interest in security

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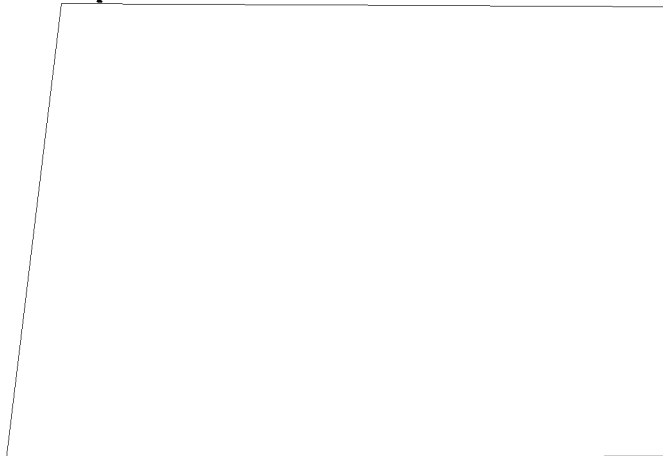
issues), the Flemish Socialists generally run a poor second to the Social Christians in Flanders. Party leaders monitor government moves on INF and attempt to raise a hue and cry when they perceive progress toward deployment. Their efforts to interest the Belgian people in actively opposing INF have not had much success, and, in our view, their numerical weakness in parliament makes them little more than a nuisance. [REDACTED]

Government Role vs Opposition Role

Political observers often assert that leftist parties become more radical when they leave the government and go into opposition. In our judgment, it would be more precise to say that major figures in a party hew more closely to predominant party sentiment when they leave the government. After an electoral defeat, party unity is at a premium, yet dissatisfaction within the party is likely to be high as dissidents blame former government leaders for excessive compromise that they believe led to defeat. Under such circumstances, no longer needing to bargain with coalition partners or with representatives of other Allied countries, leaders often—though not invariably—revert to “fundamentalist” social democratic principles, including a strong commitment to disarmament. [REDACTED]

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Impact on Government Policies



In Belgium and especially the Netherlands, the positions of the opposition parties are a thorn in the side of the governments and a significant factor discouraging governmental commitments to INF deployment, but other factors are clearly more influential. In Belgium, a complex political balance and the priority assigned

to difficult domestic issues, in our opinion, have the greatest influence over INF prospects, while in the Netherlands an anti-INF minority within the ruling Christian Democrats bears a large share of the responsibility for the government's policy. [REDACTED]

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The Norwegian Government, despite a narrow majority in parliament, appears confident of its ability to withstand criticism over INF from the Labor Party. The Danish Social Democrats have more leverage; if they choose to line up with the far left parties, they can defeat the government on security issues. Rather than risk a vote of no confidence, the Schlueter government has accepted some parliamentary actions with which it disagreed. We believe there is a strong possibility that through parliamentary resolutions the left will be able to force the government, as it has already, to present reservations at NATO against some aspects of the alliance's INF policy. [REDACTED]

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Prospects

We believe that the leftist parties, out of self-interest as well as conviction, will continue to assert their support for membership in NATO. They will also contend, however, that NATO's commitment to detente and arms control, established in the late 1960s, should be revitalized. Should an INF arms control agreement be worked out between the United States and the USSR, leaderships of the West German and Scandinavian—and perhaps the Flemish—parties might support it, even if it entailed some INF deployments. Party leftwingers would dissent loudly, however, and some might defect to smaller parties. The British and Dutch Labor parties probably would continue to oppose deployment in their countries. [REDACTED]

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Should the Geneva negotiations remain essentially deadlocked, we believe that these parties would become even more anxious to promote disarmament. The previous commitment to an East-West military balance, already modified to an “approximate” military balance in party parlance, would erode further. The idea of limited unilateral disarmament gestures by the West to encourage reciprocal disarmament

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would almost certainly gain popularity in leftist parties. Nuclear-weapons-free zones would be discussed in increasingly concrete terms. The parties would in any case disclaim anti-Americanism, but would portray themselves as guardians of the national interest against American attempts to dictate security policy.

[redacted]

If the parties returned to power, historical precedent suggests that some of their rhetoric would be toned down as party leaders endeavored to avoid interallied disputes. The familiar pattern would begin to emerge: party organizations would be more demanding on disarmament issues while governments tried to finesse them. But it is unlikely that the genie of antinuclear sentiment could be stuffed all the way back into the bottle.

[redacted] many party activists are convinced that NATO's former equal emphasis on military balance and detente has been disrupted. There is a growing conviction among them that, in an age of overkill, precise military balances are unnecessary for deterrence. Moreover, many international affairs specialists in the parties, such as Klaas de Vries in the Netherlands, Egon Bahr in West Germany, and Louis Tobback in Belgium, have said publicly that their countries should beware of US pressure and guard their sovereignty more carefully in the making of security policy.

Thus, even in power, leftist parties—while grudgingly accepting the concept of nuclear deterrence—probably would seek to shift the burdens of deterrence away from Europe toward North America. We believe that they would also argue for arms control concessions that other Allies would find unacceptable. The risks, they would contend, are less than the risk of continued East-West confrontation. Having experienced the trauma of INF, moreover, they would be unlikely to approve further deployments of nuclear or chemical weapons on their territory, and party experts would actively examine ways of reducing their countries' nuclear-weapons role in NATO.

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